1. (Original) A method of reallocating switching circuitry in a switching fabric to permit data transfer among a plurality of interface units each having a plurality of data ports, the switching fabric being partitionable into a plurality of switch planes such that each switch plane is assignable to transfer data associated with a like data port of the plurality of interface units and each switch plane including multiple switching [channels] data communication links each being assignable to transfer data associated with one data port of one of the interface units, the method comprising:

determining a number of interface units connected to the switching fabric;

determining a number of switching [channels] data communication links in each switch plane ; and

if the number of interface units is less than the number of switching [channels] data communication links in each switch plane, for at least one of the plurality of switch planes, assigning a first [channel] data communication link in the switch plane to transfer data associated with a first data port of a first interface unit and assigning a second [channel] data communication link in the switch plane to transfer data associated with a second data port of the first interface unit.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein each interface unit comprises twelve data ports.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein each switch plane comprises sixteen switching [channels] data communication links.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein switching circuitry is reallocated

such that the number of switch planes in the switching fabric can be reduced.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the switching circuitry is reallocated such that the number of switch planes in the switching fabric can be reduced by one half.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein switching [channels] data communication links in the switch planes are assigned to data ports via an allocation table stored in a memory.

7. (Original) The method of claim 6 wherein the switching circuitry is reallocated by updating the allocation table.

8. (Original) An apparatus for reallocating switching circuitry in a switching fabric to permit data transfer among a plurality of interface units each having a plurality of data ports, the switching fabric being partitionable into a plurality of switch planes such that each switch plane is assignable to transfer data associated with a like data port of the plurality of interface units and each switch plane including multiple switching [channels] data communication links each being assignable to transfer data associated with one data port of one of the interface units, the apparatus comprising:

a memory for storing an allocation table that stores assignments of the switching [channels] data communication links to data ports of the interface units; and

a processor (I) determining a number of interface units connected to the switching fabric, (ii) determining a number of switching [channels] data communication links in each switch plane, and (iii) if the number of interface units is less than the number of switching [channels] data communication links in each switch plane, for at least the plurality of switch planes, assigning a first

[channel] data communication link in the switch plane to transfer data associated with a first data port of a first interface unit and assigning a second [channel] data communication link in the switch plane to transfer data associated with a second data port of the first interface unit.

9. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 8 wherein the processor updates the allocation table to include new assignments of the switching[channels] data communication links to data ports of the interface units.

10. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim [1] 8 wherein each interface unit comprises twelve data ports.

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [1] 8 wherein each switch plane comprises sixteen switching [channels] data communication links.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [1] 8 wherein switching circuitry is reallocated such that the number of switch planes in the switching fabric can be reduced.

13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [1] 8 wherein the switching circuitry is reallocated such that the number of switch planes in the switching fabric can be reduced by one half.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [6] 8 wherein the switching circuitry is reallocated by updating the allocation table.